

INTERNATIONAL LONGSHORE AND WAREHOUSE UNION
PACIFIC COAST PENSIONERS ASSOCIATION ORAL HISTORY PROJECT
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HELENA JONES OF ILWU LOCAL 13, LOCAL 63, PCPA

INTERVIEWEE: HELENA JONES

INTERVIEWERS: HARVEY SCHWARTZ, CONOR CASEY

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[00:00:00] **HARVEY SCHWARTZ:** This is Harvey Schwartz. We're in Vancouver. It's September 16, 2014. We're with Helena Jones today as part of the Pacific Coast Pensioners Oral History Project. Helena, can you tell me when you were born and where you were born?

[00:00:21] **HELENA JONES:** I was born in Long Beach, California in 1960, Saint Mary's hospital.

[00:00:26] **HARVEY:** Tell me a little bit about your experience growing up in Long Beach.

[00:00:32] **HELENA:** My parents moved to Wilmington in 1942, and I've lived my entire life in Wilmington, which is the heart of the harbor, the port town. I still live there today. Grew up in the sixties. I was a sixties kid. I was the baby of six.

[00:00:50] **HARVEY:** What do you mean, you were a sixties kid?

[00:00:52] **HELENA:** I grew up in the sixties, you know. Born in 1960. My short childhood was in the sixties. Great time.

[00:01:02] **HARVEY:** I'm familiar—that your sister had physical challenges. Can you outline your experiences around that a little bit?

[00:01:09] **HELENA:** When I was born, my seven-year-old sister got juvenile rheumatoid arthritis. She suffered for 53 years with that disease, and she passed away last year. I know we spoke before. Having a sister with disabilities made me the person I am today: responsible, taking care of somebody, the 24-hour job.

[00:01:36] **HARVEY:** Want to describe it a little bit about what you did to help her? I think that does fill out—

[00:01:40] **HELENA:** Everything from feeding her, to bathing her, lifting her, dressing her, pushing her around in the wheelchair. Everything. The arthritis was so bad, it got to the point where she couldn't even lift her arms.

[00:02:00] **HARVEY:** Why do you say that made you the person you are?

[00:02:05] **HELENA:** [Me] being the baby and the last of the kids at home, she needed so much help with everything. She was the first child in America to have total hip replacement, so she was able to walk again. She just needed constant care. My mom was so tired that I was the next one there to help her. I know that through her illness I became a really responsible person. I even drove her places when I didn't even have my license. To Cal State Dominguez [California State University, Dominguez Hills] . She got her master's degree from there. So I would drive her because my mom was like, "Go ahead and just take the car. Go ahead and take her." She had a little electric cart, and it had a big motor, a big battery. I would get that out of the car, and the battery, and get her to university. She might have been crippled, but she was everything but crippled.

[00:03:15] **HARVEY:** You had several brothers as I recall.

[00:03:20] **HELENA:** I had three brothers, and two sisters.

[00:03:24] **HARVEY:** What did your dad do for work?

[00:03:25] **HELENA:** He was a structural steel ironworker, and he was the owner of A-1 Erection in Wilmington, California. My brothers and my father did take part in the building of the Vincent Thomas Bridge and the Gerald Desmond [Bridge] . That list can go on and on.

[00:03:46] **HARVEY:** Where'd you go to high school?

[00:03:48] **HELENA:** Mary Star of the Sea, a Catholic high school in San Pedro, California.

[00:03:52] **HARVEY:** What'd you do after high school?

[00:03:54] **HELENA:** I joined my first union, the Retail Clerks Union, Union 770 in Harbor City. I joined at 18 years old, which was kind of a big deal because, you know, you could work part-time for the grocery store, but to be a journeyman. . . It was kind of a big deal to be able to get that status, to get into the union. I did that for a couple of years while I went to college.

[00:04:23] **HARVEY:** Where did you go to college?

[00:04:24] **HELENA:** Harbor College in Wilmington. Then my brothers came to me. They were taking women into the predominantly male—

[00:04:36] **HARVEY:** Before we get to that, let me ask you. Were you drawn to a union job to begin with, and why? As a retail clerk?

[00:04:48] **HELENA:** It's a better paying job, and it's organized labor. There's benefits, and just to seek a higher level job than just working a part-time fast food place. When I was in college, I thought about being an accountant. I went and spoke with a professor there, trying to figure out what area I was going to go into. I was already working for the grocery store. He asked how much I made. He said, "You know, you make as much as I make, almost." Which was really sad. He goes, "If you don't know what you're going to do, stick with that."

Then I was later addressed with joining another union.

[00:05:40] **HARVEY:** Were there discussions of unions when you were growing up?

[00:05:42] **HELENA:** Oh, yes. My father was a union—my whole house came from a very strong union family. My father's company, he didn't have to be union worker but he was a union company. He hired union ironworkers.

[00:05:57] **HARVEY:** He was an ironworker himself.

[00:05:58] **HELENA:** Yes.

[00:05:59] **HARVEY:** So he started out as—

[00:06:01] **HELENA:** He started out—he came to California from Nebraska in 1938, and he went into the oil fields. He did come onto the docks for a short period of time. But as an oil driller, he made a little bit more money, so he did that instead.

[00:06:20] **HARVEY:** Ok, let's go back to where you made the transition to the ironworkers. So what happened with your brother? Did something happen with your brother?

[00:06:30] **HELENA:** In 1981, I remember he came to my bedroom and knocked on the door. I was a single mother of a little girl. He said, "Hey, they have to take women. The Supreme Court passed that women have to be taken into the males' workplace. Don't tell anybody I told you, but, if we're going to take women, it might as well be you." I said, "How much are they paying an hour?" Because I grew up with ironworker benefits. He goes, "Almost ten bucks an hour." I go, "Where do I go?"

[00:07:05] **HARVEY:** What were you making as a retail clerk?

[00:07:08] **HELENA:** I think six dollars an hour. And so this was almost ten. Of course, I had to go to an apprentice program for three years' college at Cerritos College two nights a week, plus work full time. But it took a little while for the union to place me because they didn't know where to put a girl. I was the first female ironworker of all the southern California-Nevada area. They didn't know where to put me, so it took a little while.

They put me at Champlin Oil Refinery there in Wilmington. It's now in Vallejo [, California] . I worked there for one solid year. With about 5,000 men on the job, they wouldn't even let me on the job; they put me in a boneyard for three months by myself. I mastered the torch, and I made shims all day. All day long, just made shims. The little steward, which was a World War II vet, he would come and have lunch with me every day and tell me all kinds of great stories.

Finally, at the end of three months, my general foreman came out. He told me to get in the truck, and I got a little scared. Just like, 'where are we going?' He took me out a little ways and pulled a bridge belt out, a Klein bridge belt [tool belt] that he had ordered brand new, small size. He gave me that bridge belt, and he goes, "I know where to put you today. I'm going to put you in a gang." He drove me to the top gang, which is the raising gang. I got out of that car, and I'm going over to the big boys, the ones that raise the iron. The elite group. They wouldn't even look at me. I'm like, "Hi guys!" [waving]

One thing I really remember is, the foreman goes, "You ever been on the E ride at Disneyland?" [reference to an exciting theme park ride] "Sure." He had me get in the basket that the ironworkers had made of iron. I was in there with a big ironworker, and he goes, "I want you to help him." He shot me up in a crane, right into the top of the building. He had a giant impact gun. Now, how am I going to help this 6 foot 5 [inches] guy? So I'm just holding the impact gun.

That was my first experience, and I was in the raising gang, which was the perfect place because there was no chit chat going on. It was all business. If I would have been in another gang, there would be too much time on the hand with being one of the only girls on the job. It was kind of interesting where they put me.

[00:09:55] **HARVEY:** It is interesting. A lot of women I've talked to who were construction workers hit difficulties at some point with the guys. Some guy would say things that were inappropriate and so forth. Did you have any of that?

[00:10:15] **HELENA:** I would go into the outhouse, and there would be a different drawing every day of things that I was doing with everybody on the job. Eventually it got so bad that they gave me my own outhouse with a padlock. So I could have a 'clean' outhouse without all these drawings. Plus—one time I took a marker out. And you could tell. "So, she was with me," or whatever.

[00:10:50] **HARVEY:** Your name was on there?

[00:10:52] **HELENA:** Yes! Yes, all kinds of terrible things. These detailed drawings of women's parts and things. I remember I put on there, "Oh, you wish," or something. "That's not what I saw," or whatever. You had to take it; you were in their world.

I got to say, the ironworkers, most of the time, they respected me. Probably because of my father having his company. My father was retired when I got in. My father didn't even talk to me for six months when I was doing this job. He was so upset! That his daughter was going to work down there. Later on my mom told me,

the reason why he was so upset is he thought that somebody was going to rape me or something like that. I was like, ‘what?!’ He was so worried.

But we became the best of the best because I ended up welding with my father. He had a big yard down by Local 13 in Wilmington. We would go down there and make things together. It was just grand. It was really cool.

[00:12:04] **HARVEY:** How long did you do that?

[00:12:06] **HELENA:** Three years, and right when I turned out of the journeymen, I actually got top of the class. I was the top of my class in the ironworkers program. Being the only woman, you have to strive to be the best. I remember I could climb iron—which, I think about that now. We had a test climbing that I-beam, just with your feet and hands. Flipping my leg up on top of there. I remember the teachers just looking. The guy who was doing it with me couldn’t do it. They go, “Oh, that’s really good. She’s up there and you’re not.”

So I turned out three years later. I got my journeyman’s book. Then I put my application in. They were taking applications in 1984; they were going to take a big group, 350 people at the waterfront. Out of almost 30,000 applicants, I was the number one girl, scored. Back then it was on a scoring, college. Almost everything they required, I had because I had those three years of college. Safety, rigging, just everything they were asking for. I was told that later, that I was the number one girl picked. What an honor that was.

[00:13:21] **HARVEY:** Yes, really. Why did you decide to switch from the ironworkers into the longshore?

[00:13:30] **HELENA:** Growing up in Wilmington around these docks, I got a K-card in 1978, right out of high school. You can call it a K-card or a B-number; it was B 6377. I would get all the extra clerking. I’d call up in the morning to a phone number, “Is there any work today?” They’d say, “Yeah, go down to so-and-so, so-and-so.”

I remember going down to my first day. I’m sitting on the guy’s forklift—an outside driver, a Teamster, not even a longshoreman. I’m just sitting right with him. I don’t know any better. I’m 18 years old. He’s driving around all day, with me on his little forklift. I learned later, you don’t do that. You’re the clerk; you go over here. So I’m over here on this guy’s forklift, right next to him, all day long. He’s probably loving life. I didn’t know any better.

That was the start of down there, and I always wanted to be down there.

[00:14:34] **HARVEY:** How come?

[00:14:36] **HELENA:** It was right by the house, and you can work inside and outside, and it’s such a beautiful job. If you work out of the hall, you can work when you want to work. So with my little girl, if she was sick, and I was a single mom, you can just call up and go, “Replace me today.” Or just not go. I can be a mom and also make a living at the same time. I don’t think there’s another job that you can do that.

[00:15:13] **HARVEY:** How did you learn that much about the longshore union before? Even when you’re young, 18, and also later on. How does the culture get transmitted?

[00:15:27] **HELENA:** I had a family friend that knew I was out of high school. He was dispatching at the time. He called up, “What are you doing? Get your shoes on. Get dressed. Get down to”—there was a dock in

Wilmington. I said, “To do what?” “You’re going to go to work. I know you’re out of school, and I need someone to take this job.” That’s what started it. Then when I get down there, it was checking—I was into numbers and all those things. I just loved that. So then I put my application in.

Actually, the Golden suit [*Golden v. Pacific Maritime Association*, 1982 decree that women must hold 20% of longshore and 25% of clerk jobs] came out, and they sent me the court papers. It said for myself to go down and come to the hearing. I went down and showed Local 63’s president at the time the papers because I didn’t understand them. He’s all, “Just ignore that. That doesn’t pertain to you.” You know if I would have went that day, that I would have been in, right then? Just sad.

Meanwhile, I became an ironworker. I would try to work on the waterfront, when I got a chance in between iron working and going to school.

[00:16:43] **HARVEY:** You really wanted on the waterfront because of reasons you outlined.

[00:16:45] **HELENA:** I had to keep that card up because, if you didn’t keep that card up, I think you had to work once every six months. I’d go down and get a day to keep that card. One day it’s going to open back up. I could’ve gotten in with the Golden Suit. [bang fist on knee]

But it wasn’t meant to be! But I’m glad I was an ironworker because that was really...I look back now. Built the Thomas Bradley International Terminal, Terminal 3. I worked for Owens and Illinois Glass Factory. They make bottles and stuff. We renovated it. Really cool.

[00:17:22] **HARVEY:** Tell me about your experience early on. Is it ’84 that you...?

[00:17:28] **HELENA:** ‘78. I was one of the first female pioneers on the waterfront. I wasn’t in, but ‘78 I never saw another woman down there. There probably was [other women] , but I never saw one.

[00:17:40] **HARVEY:** But then you got—

[00:17:40] **HELENA:** I didn’t start until February of 1985. Got notified in the end of ‘84.

[00:17:51] **HARVEY:** So you started in 1985.

[00:17:53] **HELENA:** Yes.

[00:17:54] **HARVEY:** You expect to go into the clerks?

[00:17:56] **HELENA:** Yes, it’s kind of a long story. I had to go to Local 13 first.

[00:18:00] **HARVEY:** What happened? How come you went to 13 initially?

[00:18:05] **HELENA:** I got a letter in the mail saying that “You’re a class B clerk upon completion of your physical.” So I went to a meeting, and there was 15 of us. They said, “You have to quit your other local. Can’t belong to two locals.” I took a withdraw from the ironworkers. It was a big deal for me to take a withdraw from that union. I just got journeyman status.

So I did. Then about a week later, we met up. We were supposed to get registered. In the group of 15, somebody brought up that it was nepotism for these first 15 women that scored the highest. I don’t really know anybody

on the waterfront; I have no family on the waterfront. So they were scared that some nepotism suit was going to come because somebody wrote a list and said so-and-so's this, so-and-so's the PMA's mother, and girlfriend, and all this. I was listed as the Stamper family's neighbor. I was three houses down from them. That doesn't help me get a job! [shakes head]

So, what they did was, the [? cose?] said "We have to hire groups of 50, so you guys just hang on. We'll get 35 more girls, and we'll hire you 50." Meanwhile, they have a lottery. They put my name into a hat and drew me out. The first 50 girls got clerking. Well, they picked me somewhere between the other hundred people, and I got longshoring.

I went through the grievance machinery. I went to the PMA [Pacific Maritime Association]. I said "I would have never quit my ironworker job if I wouldn't have got clerking." As an ironworker, my back was already bad, plus from all the lifting of my sister for all those years. It bothered me. They said, "Well, you got a job. You got a job." I get longshoring—not that longshoring is bad! But I would have never given up my ironworker job. They never answered me in the grievance, but I just kept doing exactly what they told me to do.

I hate to say it because it sounds really bad, but we had a lawyer represent us. Out of the 15, eight of them got clerking, and it left the seven. So we're the "Fabulous Seven."

[00:20:31] **HARVEY:** Was Chris one of them?

[00:20:32] **HELENA:** Yes, she was. I remember on the first day they told us we weren't going to have that job, I went out in the parking lot, and I looked at her. She was getting into her brown convertible Rabbit [car]. I looked at her, and I go, "Hey!" [holds hands palms up] Like, "What the hell?" And so, we became friends.

We exchanged numbers. I said, "We need to do something. They're not answering us." We contacted them; we weren't suing for any money, just breach of contract. We wanted our jobs back.

We dropped the lawsuit for one year because our lawyer's secretary wrote a letter, and it was misspelled. We were so embarrassed. We dropped it for about a year. Picked it backup, and Bob Remar, the lawyer for the ILWU, he interviewed me. He asked me about what was happening down there. I was harassed so bad. I was one of the first females to have a baby in Local 13. And the harassment while I was pregnant. . . As I explained some things to him, I guess after my deposition he called and said, "You better hire these girls right now." I got a phone call the next day that said 'come on down and register as a clerk.'

[00:21:59] **HARVEY:** As a clerk?

[00:21:59] **HELENA:** Yes.

[00:22:00] **HARVEY:** So how long were you a longshore worker?

[00:22:03] **HELENA:** Three years. I got in in 1989. So, almost four years.

[00:22:13] **HARVEY:** What's it like doing longshore work?

[00:22:19] **HELENA:** It was very similar to ironwork. Ironwork was a little more physical. I remember we went out on the job, and I had a lashing job. I went to the wrong window, or they gave me the wrong ticket. I was going to drive a paper lift that day, and he gave me lashing. I was telling this other girl, "Just follow me, sister. I'll show you how to drive that machine." She had never worked on the waterfront. And he gave me the

wrong ticket. “Oh, I’ve got the wrong ticket.” He yelled out, “Hey, b—, you wanted to be a longshoreman. So take the job.” Embarrassed me in front of everybody. So I took the job.

So I go out to the job. Now I’ve got my work boots and my gloves, and my overalls are worn in from being an ironworker. That same guy that yelled out was working with me. Had to work right next to me. So I showed him. I could do those turnbuckles faster than he could. At the end of the break he goes, “Where are you from?” I go, “I’m a journeyman ironworker, pal.” He goes, “I’m wanna apologize to you.” “Yes, you shouldn’t judge a book by its cover.”

[00:23:40] **HARVEY:** That’s a good, good story.

[00:23:42] **HELENA:** That was a good one, man. So when I became a supercargo chief supervisor, he’s a boss. I remember just looking at him over the years, like ‘mm-hmm.’

[00:23:54] **HARVEY:** That’s really something. Any other stories like that? During that three-year period?

[00:24:00] **HELENA:** I think what really is important is something—when I was pregnant, I asked for a red tag, it was called, to do signaling or checking, so I wasn’t physically being pregnant down there. Still able to work. Because I was one of the seven, they really were not nice. When I asked for this red number, they would give me a dock job. Instead of giving me clerking or signaling, they would give me throwing bags of grain or bananas. When I’d go out there, the boss would fire me. Because you’re not going to be on my job and maybe get your shirt caught in a conveyer or lose your baby or something. So then I was dead for the day. They did it time and time and time again to me. Then you’re dead; you can’t get another job.

So I went to the LRC, Labor Relations [Committee] . I met with them and I explained. The president of PMA at the time, Charlie Young said, “You know what? We just don’t have rules for pregnant women. We have just never had this before. You’re absolutely right.” I said, “But I can’t be throwing grain, so it has to be strictly signaling or clerking.” “No problem.”

I come back the next month for the meeting, and Charlie Young had went to a funeral. A good friend of his had got killed on the waterfront. There was another man—I don’t want to mention any names—he went against me, and he was from Local 13. He went against the ruling of that. So you know what I said? I remember standing up and the PMA and the companies were there, at the LRC. I said, “I’m not gonna be on this red tag. If I lose this baby, I’m gonna own each one of you.” And I walked out.

When I got home, I was so upset. My husband said, “You don’t need this. Just go on maternity leave.” That was the end of that. I guess eventually it did get passed. But that was that. That’s probably my major . . .

Of course there was other things. I feel good about that now because that all got passed. But, what had happened to me, that wasn’t cool.

[00:26:39] **HARVEY:** If you’re on maternity leave, what was your income situation?

[00:26:43] **HELENA:** Oh yes, way less. But I was fortunate to be married at the time, and my husband was an ironworker. We were very blessed.

[00:26:52] **HARVEY:** So you could get by.

[00:26:53] **HELENA:** Plus, we had kids back to back, so I was kind of stuck at home for a while. A couple years, I didn't make my hours. I got cancer, too, so I had a little time off for that.

[00:27:10] **HARVEY:** Was that covered adequately under the ILWU health program?

[00:27:12] **HELENA:** Oh yes. Very blessed.

[00:27:20] **HARVEY:** You became a clerk in 1989. How long did you clerk?

[00:27:29] **HELENA:** I retired in 2009 from an injury. Outside of work. I crushed my wrist. I couldn't even open it; I do have it open now, but I crushed my wrist. I retired early.

[00:27:47] **HARVEY:** '89 to '99 to 2009, is that 20 years? Do I have that right?

[00:27:54] **HELENA:** 20 years, yes.

[00:27:55] **HARVEY:** So you were a clerk for 20 years.

[00:27:57] **HELENA:** Yes.

[00:27:57] **HARVEY:** What was all that like? What was it like in [Local] 63?

[00:28:02] **HELENA:** I came over there, and we were the famous seven. They wouldn't even tell us how to do anything. Go out to a job, and not even explain what's going on. Just throw the clipboard and say, "Figure it out." You didn't know where anything was going. You're supposed to be lined out. 'The containers are going here today, or the chassis are here.' Uh-uh. Just throw the clipboard. Figure it out.

I remember one night I was at Matson [Matson, Inc.] in the yard. Just so mean. Don't get me wrong. I love the union. It's all good. I was new, and plus I was one of the seven. I remember one night yardwork took a break. I came back and the whole place is dark. I still had my radio. Everyone's gone. They had all went home and didn't tell me on purpose. It's dark at Matson! Scary a little bit! I couldn't find anybody. Finally, I found somebody, and they just go, "They left an hour and half ago." I go, "No, I know. I'm looking for everybody." So, just to be mean.

[00:29:13] **HARVEY:** Did you feel that mellowed out at all?

[00:29:16] **HELENA:** Yes.

[00:29:17] **HARVEY:** How long did that take?

[00:29:23] **HELENA:** The day that I could go nights. Two years in, I got a key to the clerks' desk pretty quickly. I did the jobs and everything you have to do to qualify. The day I could go nights—two years' later, 1991—I went nights. I stayed nights all those years. Because I had kids. I also was a single mother of four children a little later, 1994. I had a two-year-old and other kids going up the—

[00:29:55] **HARVEY:** Where did all the other kids come from?

[00:29:56] **HELENA:** I had my daughter when I was 19. Then when I got married I had three more children. I took care of them all day and worked all night. Sometimes you get home at five in the morning, getting those

kids up at 6:30am, and I wasn't very nice sometimes. It's always one kid doesn't get up. You know, they always do that. Then you'd scream at them, and I'd drive them to school—make their lunch. As soon as they get out of the car, "I love you! Have a good day!" I used to laugh about that. "Get up!" [mock yelling] and then, "Have a nice day!" Try to get a little more sleep. I remember my two-year-old going like this, [pries eyes open] "Mom, are you awake?" "Put that video in just one more time, ok?"

Hey, I think that's what happens when you're young and you can get through that. I don't know how I got through that. If it wasn't for the ILWU, we wouldn't have had a roof over our heads. We'd have been in the gutter. Big time. I kept my house. I was able to make my mortgage, and I had my kids all in private school. We barely made it. I don't know how we made it, but God always provides. I think about that now.

[00:31:18] **HARVEY:** Do you have any work stories during that period of '89 to 2009? Any work stories you recall?

[00:31:25] **HELENA:** Right away, I recall pulling some pranks on people. It's not even work related, just pulling pranks on people at work and just laughing. I don't know if I should even say that. I had a fake leg and a hand one time. I had them in my bag, and I kept thinking 'I'm going to have an opportunity to do something with this.'

One night, I was thinking about my bag. I saw the fake leg and the fake hand in there. We were doing yard work, and it was over for the evening. We were waiting for the boss to come back to tell us we could go home. I put that arm and leg between some containers. There's a hole in the container in the bottom where a forklift can pick it up, so I put the leg and I put the hand. The moonlight was coming through the containers right there. I had a younger guy I was working with. I go, "Hey John, you know, I was out in Baker 300 and I saw something out there." Well, prior to this, there were some policemen over by the train tracks, and they were doing something. We were—"Undercover cops?" He was on the other wall, and we were both looking. Helicopter. "What's going on over there?" That planted the seed [that] something was up. I had him go out to Baker 300. "I saw something between the containers there." I remember I let the boss in on it. We go between those containers, and I go, "It's something, like, right there!" You've never heard a man scream as bad as he screamed. I'm laughing inside so bad. Then he runs out, "Call 9-1-1!" To the boss, "Oh my god, she's crushed somebody! She crushed them!" I forgot that this poor guy's stepfather had been killed on the waterfront. Of all people to pick, you know? But I forgot about that!

Anyway, we walked back in there to show the boss. He knew about it. I remember I reached down and picked that leg up and threw it at him. "Oh my gosh," he said, "I'm gonna get you back." I don't even know why I just told you that, but that comes to mind sometimes.

But I think becoming a supercargo, and not all women or men did that. You only got paid about \$20 more a night. It was the highest I could go, chief supervisor. I asked to go steady quite a few times. But having those kids, I had to be flexible. I had some real good years down there. I really enjoyed it, and I really enjoyed the chief supervisor position. A lot of good people.

[00:34:15] **HARVEY:** What activities were you involved in in those days, whether in the local or in the community?

[00:34:22] **HELENA:** Well, I'm a pretty devout Catholic. We never had a community room to meet—next to our church, and it's the second oldest parish in Los Angeles. 1865. My grandparents came from Long Beach horse and buggy to attend mass because there was no other Catholic church. So they never had a hall, to just

socialize a little bit, you know, breakfast or something. Father [priest] decided it was time to build a building. He picked me to be vice president of the fundraising, and we raised \$1.2 million to build that. I was pretty involved with that. Let alone the kids, and then my hobby's cooking. I love to cook. People ask you, "What kind of books do you read?" Cookbooks! I could spend hours doing that, hours.

[00:35:20] **HARVEY:** How about community politics, social justice movements? Any involvement with that?

[00:35:25] **HELENA:** I was pretty involved with the ironworkers that way. Having the children of course limited me that way. A little involved with Wilmington, just with town meetings and things like that. Wilmington is the runt. It brings in a lot of revenue, but it's San Pedro that gets the money. We've been waiting years to have a restaurant at the waterfront. There's only a small area. Years, and it just never will be built.

[00:35:52] **HARVEY:** A what?

[00:35:53] **HELENA:** A restaurant down, a café down by the water, something. Still not built. 15 years on the books. I plan on being more involved in that. That's why I got so involved. I'm on the executive board, and I'm one of five trustees for the Pensioners for the last two years. So I've really thrown myself into the Pensioners.

[00:36:19] **HARVEY:** How come?

[00:36:20] **HELENA:** I want to give it back to the greatest union in the world. What they did for me. It's time now with my children raised. I've spent a lot of time doing things with the union. Striking, protesting for our benefits here last year. Chris [Christine Gordon] and I led the Labor Day parade. We were the first one down the street. Walking in my hometown for my union was really a touching moment for me. That parade was the thirty-fifth year that they paraded. All the labor groups are there. Ironworkers were there and the pipefitters and everybody. Then they have a lot of political speaking at the park after and barbeque and all those things. So that was pretty cool. I just did this last Labor Day.

[00:37:08] **HARVEY:** Just recently. As a craft worker at one point, what is your feeling about the ILWU leaving the AFL-CIO?

[00:37:18] **HELENA:** [audible sigh] I just can't believe that we're all supposed to solid, organized together, and they just weren't being a team player.

[00:37:34] **HARVEY:** Who wasn't being a team player?

[00:37:35] **HELENA:** The AL—the—

[00:37:37] **HARVEY:** The ILA [International Longshoremen's Association] and so forth?

[00:37:41] **HELENA:** Big Bob [McEllrath, ILWU president], he made that decision to do that, and I think it was a good decision.

[00:37:52] **HARVEY:** What have I missed? What major things have I missed?

[00:37:56] **HELENA:** [shrugs and shakes her head] I could go on and on forever. But I don't know exactly what you'd want to know.

[00:38:20] **HARVEY:** Conor, do you have a question?

[00:38:22] **CONOR CASEY:** Yes. It seems like you were in two trades with really long craft traditions. Sometimes there's celebrations or traditions that people have when they start out in a particular job, or there's different things that they do for holidays or whatever. Can you remember any of the almost, like, folklore celebrations you would have as an ironworker or at the ILWU?

[00:38:47] **HELENA:** The ironworkers would also have a Labor Day parade. So it was an annual family thing to go to that. Like we do. Bloody Thursday, you know.

Oh, I know one thing I could tell you guys. This kind of just brought it up. My uncles, Victor and Vincent McManus in 1934 were there on the night that [John] Knudsen and [Dickie] Parker got shot. My mom was born in 1922. She remembers that night her brothers come piling into the house, woke everybody up in the house. They were all beat up, and they were merchant marines. They were down there that night helping the ILWU organize. I think that's just really cool because then I ended up being down there. So they were there that night where the first blood was shed on the West Coast.

[00:39:50] **HARVEY:** That's quite a background.

[00:39:50] **HELENA:** They didn't know their little niece—what they did for me and my life. Really proud that they were down there.

[00:40:01] **HARVEY:** That's nice, yes. I think we got it. Sure appreciate it.

[00:40:07] **HELENA:** God bless the ILWU. Thank you, Harvey. Thank you, Conor.

[00:40:12] **HARVEY:** Thank you, Helena. Much appreciated.

[00:40:13] **HELENA:** You're welcome.

[00:40:15] **HARVEY:** Glad we could make it work.